



Publishing Nonfiction Books on Spirituality

benebell wen

MODULE 3 TRADITIONAL PUBLISHING

Workbook E The Book Proposal

It's true that when it comes to nonfiction, there is a chance you can propose a book and secure a publishing deal with a traditional publisher before you've completed the manuscript. But let's be realistic here. With few exceptions, that scenario applies to Hillary Clinton and Kim Kardashian. You either need to be a notable figure or someone with previous book publications.

For first-time authors who don't have a mainstream-established reputation, it's probably best to have a completed manuscript before querying publishers. Again, that's just my own observation. I've found that experiences vary based on author and based on the publisher you're querying. You can certainly try for the book proposal and write a few sample chapters before you have a completed book. But if you want my recommendation, finish the book first.

Workbook E will guide you through prompts to gather information that you will need for your book proposal. Also, once your book is accepted for publication by a traditional publisher, your editor will probably send you an author questionnaire. Many of the questions on that questionnaire will resemble the prompts in this workbook and the earlier workbooks of the course. Thus, all of these workbooks in totality are intended to prepare you for publication.

Handout 10 is a sample book proposal, or more specifically, the boilerplate book proposal I used for submitting *Holistic Tarot* to publishers. However, you don't want to follow the format of that sample blindly. Every publisher will have its own specific guidelines for how to organize your book proposal. Follow the publisher guidelines to the tee, and not the sample provided in this course.



Your book in one sentence.

Summarize your book in one sentence. Begin with the title of your book followed by “is” and then complete the sentence. For example: “*Holistic Tarot* is a desktop reference guide to tarot divination, proposing an analytical approach for understanding creative intuition.” Or “*The Tao of Craft* is an introduction to the history, culture, and magical practice of sigil crafting in the Eastern esoteric traditions.” You will find one recurring piece of advice everywhere: as an author you better be able to summarize your book in one sentence. Here’s your chance to practice.

is

(title of your book)

(finish the sentence)

Three Reasons to Buy Your Book

List three reasons why someone would want to buy your book.

For example, *The Psychic Healing Book* by Amy Wallace and Bill Henkin might say “to learn advanced techniques for contacting spirit guides” or “to learn how to use color meditation for self-healing.” For Michelle Derusha’s *Spiritual Misfit: A Memoir of Uneasy Faith*, a listed reason could be “to feel validated that disbelief and doubt can still lead to a close relationship with God.”

1	
2	
3	

Most distinguishing feature of your book.

Let’s face it. There are many books on the market right now that are similar to your book. However, one key feature distinguishes you apart from the pack. What is that key feature? What makes your book different from all the other options out there right now? To help brainstorm, skip this prompt for now and work on the next one, listing comparable titles. Then return to this prompt to note how your book is distinct from the comparables.

Comparable Titles

To play it safe and so if you're ever asked this question, you'll look informed, let's research five comparable book titles to your own. Try to keep these five titles recent, i.e., books published within the last five years. Only if you can't identify titles within the last five years should you explore beyond the five year mark. Log your researched comparables (they'll also be referred to as "comps") below. For each title, assess how your book and that title are similar. Then assess how they are different, and most importantly, how your book fills a void that the comparable title didn't cover.

Book Title	Author	Publisher	Date of Publication
Page Count	Similarities between this title and your book	Differences between this title and your book	

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The Book Overview.

Imagine yourself addressing a prospective editor at a publishing house. You need to pitch your book to that editor. Draft a two-paragraph overview about your book (one paragraph per box below). Keep each paragraph to a minimum of three sentences and maximum of five sentences. The style and tone of your overview should reflect the style and tone of your book. Incorporate what you wrote for “your book in one sentence” and find a subtle way to weave in your three reasons for buying your book.

Paragraph 1 should introduce a problem or a demand that needs to be filled. Consider inclusion of statistics, anecdotes, or an appeal to a void that the editor can acknowledge. Paragraph 2 presents your book as the solution. One of the sentences in this paragraph can be lifted from the “your-book-in-one-sentence” exercise earlier. Refer back to Workbook C. What is the promise you’re making to your reader? Incorporate that into your overview. Feel free to reuse any sentences from the previous book description exercises that you really like. Alternatively, if you are writing a memoir about your spiritual journey, then poignant personal experiences should be accounted here in the overview. The total word count of your overview should be under 500 words.

Delete blue text and draft Paragraph 1 here.

Delete blue text and draft Paragraph 2 here.

250 word book description.

At some point you will need to draft copy (“copy” means text) for a book description in 300 words or less. Sometimes the specifications given to you may be 250 words or less. To play it safe, let’s draft a book description in 250 words or less. When drafting your description, write for your target reader. Envision yourself addressing the target reader directly, and persuade that reader to buy your book. Think of this as the copy that you find on the back book cover. Envision yourself writing the copy that will appear on the back cover of your published book.

Book Description Word Count:

100-150 word book description.

You might also find yourself needing a book description that is within the range of 100 to 150 words. So to prepare, we're going to draft a second version of what you wrote earlier, truncated down to the 100-150 word limit. Again, write for your target reader. Envision that reader sitting across the table from you and you are giving this pitch. Now that you have both a 250-word and 150-word book description readily available, you're able to submit whichever one is required of you with less than a moment's notice. It's good to be prepared.

Book Description Word Count

Target Audience.

Who is going to buy your book? How big is that market segment? You'll want to do a little research here. Reflect back on Workbook A, "Examining the Seed." What points do the two individuals you envisioned have in common? Is it their professional background? Religious beliefs? Age range? The points they have in common will help you think about how to profile your target audience. In my book proposal for *Holistic Tarot*, I noted that that the target reader was a corporate or creative professional interested in alternative lifestyle practices and learning to use tarot for decision-making and triggering creative intuition. I researched tarot references in mainstream media and noted those as signs of a rapidly increasing public interest in tarot.

Three Recent Mainstream References to Your Subject Matter

Identify three recent (i.e., last three years) references to your subject matter in pop culture, news, or the media. For example, if your book is about Elder Futhark runes, then you might mention a blockbuster movie that prominently features rune magic, thereby generating public interest in rune divination.

1	Name/Title	
	Media Type	
	Year of Release	
	Notes	
2	Name/Title	
	Media Type	
	Year of Release	
	Notes	
3	Name/Title	
	Media Type	
	Year of Release	
	Notes	

Your author biography.

Begin with what you gauge to be the most interesting nugget of information about your professional biography. Then cover your experiences and professional background as it would pertain to the subject matter of the book. Think of your biography as a persuasive argument for why you are qualified to write this book. If you're writing a memoir, then include any relevant personal experiences that were the catalyst to writing your book. Typically, a biography will end with personal information that might be of interest. Keep your author biography between 50 and 150 words in length.

Points to Consider:

- Educational degrees
- Professional certifications
- Years of experience
- Teaching background
- Public speaking events
- Media appearances
- Previous publications
- Awards and accolades
- Personal background
- Personal interests

Your author platform.

Revisit Workbook B, “Establishing Your Author Platform” and be sure to note your public speaking engagements, media appearances, previous publications, and social media following.

List your public speaking engagements.

Ex. Conferences, panels, workshops, presentations, etc.

List your media appearances.

Ex. Features in magazine or newspaper articles, local radio or TV appearances, features on national or international blogs.

List your previous publications.

Ex. Articles written for magazines or journals, syndicated columns in local newspapers, etc.

Note your social media following.

Ex. Total number of subscribers on your Facebook page, Twitter, or Instagram.

Summarize the above lists into a cohesive paragraph.

Blank space for summarizing the lists into a cohesive paragraph.

Your Marketing Plan

BOOK REVIEWS

In the marketing plan that you will submit with your book proposal, note which magazines, newspapers, or national websites you anticipate querying for prospective book reviews. Do your research now. Look up each magazine one by one, look for the masthead or editorial board, and note which editor to contact about a book review and note the contact information, e.g., an email address or mailing address, in your marketing plan. This will convey to the publisher how serious you are about doing your share of promotions and publicity. Use the space below to brainstorm prospective magazines. In the “Misc. Notes” column, indicate why you would want to contact this publication.

<i>Publication Name</i>	<i>Contact Information</i>	<i>Editor Name</i>	<i>Misc. Notes</i>

CONFERENCES

Note any national conferences relevant to the subject matter of your book. If you have attended these conferences before, spoken at them, or have inside contacts with the conference organizers, note this to the publisher.

<i>Conference Name & Website URL</i>	<i>Location of Conference</i>	<i>Date of Next Event</i>

ENDORSEMENTS

Endorsements are the blurbs from published authors, experts in your field, media personalities, or public figures that you find on the front and back covers of a book, the front pages, on the sales sheet, or as part of the book’s marketing materials. In your marketing plan, you’ll need to prove to the publisher that you’re ready and willing to approach these individuals for endorsements. Don’t worry if you don’t actually know them. Brainstorm a list of figures who you’d like to see offer endorsements of your book. Then research their contact information online and generate a list to present to the publisher. Under “Notability,” write out their book publications, what that individual’s “claim to fame” is, and why you’re contact that person for an endorsement.

<i>Name</i>	<i>Notability</i>	<i>Contact Information</i>

UNIVERSITY MAILINGS

For nonfiction and literary fiction, your book could fit well into the syllabus for a university course listing. One way professors and instructors hear about new books that fit into the course material they're teaching is through university mailings. Spend a day researching the departments of various universities and assessing whether your book could fit into the syllabus for any of the course listings. You'll definitely want to contact your alma mater, professors you've had, and make a personalized note of that when reaching out to those contacts. *Holistic Tarot* found its way onto the syllabuses of a few occult literature classes, with university bookstores ordering direct from the publisher, so this is definitely worth looking into. Memorialize your research in the space below. Under "Misc. Notes," include why you think your book would fit into the syllabus or reading list for that particular course.

<i>University & Department Mailing Address</i>	<i>Course Name</i>	<i>Professor Name Professor Email</i>	<i>Misc. Notes</i>

Checklist for Assembling the Book Proposal

The following checklist represents content that should go in your nonfiction book proposal. The exact order may differ for you and you might not use all of the headings provided. For example, not every book proposal will include both an Overview and Book Description. Maybe yours will have a heading “Overview” only but that section will integrate content you would find for both the Overview and Book Description. The order in which you place your Author Biography will also be up to the publisher specifications or to what feels right for you.

- Overview**

Polish off the two paragraphs from “The Book Overview” section. Synthesize your responses to the prompts in this workbook to answer the following questions:

 - (1) What is the problem your book will solve?
 - (2) How will your book help to solve that problem?
 - (3) In 1-2 sentences, what is your book about?
 - (4) In 1-2 sentences, who are you and why are you qualified to solve this problem?

Keep your overview to approximately 500 words.

- Book Description**

Read the submissions guideline for each publisher carefully. If the publisher specifies what should go in the book proposal, then follow the publisher specifications. Some may ask for an Overview only, in which case the text you’ve drafted for a Book Description needs to be incorporated into your written Overview. Others may ask for a Book Description only, in which case the Overview needs to be incorporated into your Book Description. If there are no specifications, keep them separate, and include both—open the proposal with the Overview, which acts as an introduction for your proposal and follow it with the Book Description. The book description should read like the copy on the back cover of a book.

- Comparable Titles**

If the publisher has specified to you how many comparable titles to provide, then of course follow publisher specifications. Otherwise a good general number is three. List out three comparable titles, cite the books with a standard citation format (typically either APA or MLA). You want these comparable titles to be top selling, well-known books in your field. You also want to use the comparable titles to show that there is a strong public interest in this field. Use the most recent titles you can find.

- Author Biography** The author biography for your book proposal is not the same as the author biography that will accompany your book. Here, you want to incorporate elements from your author platform. The 50 to 150 word author biography you drafted earlier would be what accompanies your book, though you will want to incorporate it into the author biography for your book proposal. Add to that biography with strong elements from your author platform brainstorm.

- Target Audience** Sure, you believe your book will appeal to a wide range of readers, and it probably will. However, for the Target Audience section of your book proposal, you'll want to be specific and address the one core niche that your book will most appeal to. Think about gender, age range, occupational background, educational background, geographical location, and the percentage of the total population your core niche represents.

- Marketing Plan** The point of the marketing plan in your book proposal is to convince the publisher that you are not going to be a passive author. This is the section that proves to the publisher how dedicated you will be to promoting and publicizing your book. If you are committed to hiring your own publicist at your own expense, then this is a great time to tell the publisher that. Your marketing plan needs to convey to the publisher how much publicity effort you will be investing. To do that, you have to show the publisher that you have done your research. Who are the notable public figures you will query for author endorsements (i.e., "book blurbs")? Who do you know in the industry? Even if you hate name-dropping, this is a good time to do a little bit of that. List specific media and publications you will try to get your book featured in. (In retrospect, the marketing plan I submitted in my book proposals for *Holistic Tarot* was terrible, not specific enough, and is probably why it took so long for the book to get an offer.)

- Table of Contents** The table of contents is very important. Even if you are submitting your book proposal before you have completed your manuscript, you should definitely have a completed (or at least tentative) content outline. Recall in Workbook C how important content organization is for a nonfiction book. Your table of contents will convey to the publisher how well you have organized your book.

- Chapter One** I believe it is important to include the first chapter or the Introduction for your book, along with other sample chapters. Chapter one goes to “the first five pages” of your book, which are essentially the pages a prospective reader will use to judge whether or not to buy your book. Thus, publishers will use the first five pages to decide whether or not to publish your book.

- Sample Chapters** Be sure to check the publisher’s submission guidelines for how many sample chapters they want you to enclose with your book proposal. Some ask for only one, in which case you will want to enclose your first chapter, i.e., “the first five pages.” Other publishers will ask specifically for your first three chapters. If the publisher requests a sampling of chapters, then opt for the first one, one from the middle section, and one from the end. For *Holistic Tarot*, since it was such a large manuscript and many of the chapters were short, I included five sample chapters and two sample appendices. (Unless the publisher I was submitting to had guidelines asking for something specific, in which case I would submit exactly what the publisher asked for.)

- Query Letter** The query letter is the cover letter that precedes your book proposal. If you send the submission by post, then the order of your papers would be the query letter first and below it, your book proposal, and then the table of contents and sample chapters you are providing. Handout 7 provides a template for your query letter. In “The Submission Process,” I talk candidly about my query letter, book proposal, and submissions experience for *Holistic Tarot*.

- Author Website** I am including the author website in this checklist because it is important that you have a completed author website when you’re querying publishers with your book submission. Chances are high that if the publisher is even mildly interested in your book, the editors will first check out your author website and use it to get a sense of who you are and what you are about. So make sure you have something spectacular there for them to see.